EMERGENCY RESPONSE GUIDELINES
FOR FOODSERVICE DISTRIBUTORS
IN THE EVENT OF A PANDEMIC
Presented by the
International Foodservice Distributors Association (IFDA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is presented by the International Foodservice Distributor Association to help foodservice distributors understand and prepare for the impact of a pandemic on their business. This document was created to provide a discussion guide for each company’s pandemic preparedness planning. It is believed that careful planning can minimize the impact of a pandemic on business. It is also hoped that the application of best practices could slow the spread of the disease.

It is important to consider that these guidelines, while focused on a pandemic, could be applicable to any crisis situation, from weather-related emergencies to terrorist events. Other emergencies would include hurricanes, flooding, fire, power outages, widespread foodborne illness or terrorist attacks.

The background and recommendations included here were prepared using government data and other published sources, as well as brainstorming discussions conducted with a number of foodservice distribution executives.

DISCLAIMER

International Foodservice Distributors Association (IFDA) presents this report to aid foodservice distributors in preparing for a possible pandemic. The information in the report is current as of the publication date, but additional information may be available in the future. Distributors should continuously check www.ifdaonline.org for up-to-date information. The details found in this report may not cover every situation and may not be applicable to all distribution companies. IFDA will not take responsibility for any acts or omissions resulting from reliance, in whole or in part, on this document.
OVERVIEW

What is a pandemic?
The World Health Organization defines a pandemic as the worldwide spread of a new disease. A determination of whether it has become one is based on a geographical distribution of the virus, the severity of the disease it causes and the impact it has on the whole society.

Have pandemics occurred before?
Pandemics have occurred in the U.S. four times during the 20th century. In 1918-1919, the Spanish flu killed an estimated 50,000,000 people worldwide. In 1957-1958, the Asian flu caused 2,000,000 deaths, and in 1968-1969, the Hong Kong flu was responsible for 700,000 deaths worldwide. In 2009, a new H1N1 virus emerged in the U.S. and quickly spread across the world, killing between 150,000 and 600,000 people within 12 months.

What could happen?
The following bulleted items suggest possible events and situations that could result from a pandemic. The items are sorted by groups affected: Consumers, infrastructure, government, foodservice distribution and foodservice customers.

Consumers:
- Resist leaving home
- Overreaction and irrational behavior
- Avoidance of dining out
- If they do dine out, requirement to (1) see masks and gloves on servers and preparers, or (2) see some form of certification that servers and preparers are “safe,” i.e. have had a vaccine or have survived the flu
- Desire to buy food in bulk
- Preference for non-perishable and pre-packaged goods
- Increased use of home delivery for food and other products
- Reluctance to go to work, resulting in breakdown of infrastructure due to lack of sufficient employees to keep operations running
- Insistence on going to work even though they may be contagious because they need the paycheck
- Increased demand for masks, gloves and other anti-viral items, such as sani-wipes, whether they are proven to work or not
- Demand for country-of-origin information on food products

Infrastructure:
- Ports closed
- Restrictions on travel (air, rail, cars, trucks)
- Telecommunications failure
- Power failure
- Fuel shortage
- Interruption of public transportation
- Restricted access to highways
- Healthcare facilities unable to handle medical surge
- Need for trauma centers to be set up at schools, churches or other facilities
Government
- Martial law governing public activities
- Government mandates concerning the conduct of business, for example, price controls
- Local/State/Federal control of food supply and distribution
- Quarantines
- School closings

Foodservice distribution
- Inability to conduct normal distribution because of internal issues, such as absenteeism, or because of infrastructure issues, such as road closings
- Employees not showing up to work (This could be because of illness, fear of illness, quarantine, absence of transportation or family demands, such as children at home because of school closings)
- Incoming delivery of supplies interrupted
- Loss of business; operators closed because of public avoidance of dining out
- Computer system failure
- Security issues, e.g. theft of food if public supplies get scarce
- Need for delivery of food and supplies to alternate sites, such as trauma centers set up in schools, portable feeding locations or retail grocery stores
- Spike in demand for certain items, such as N95 masks, gowns, gloves, anti-bacterial wipes, disposables
- Fuel shortage, causing problems from delivery to the need to find alternate ways to get employees to work

Foodservice Customers:
- Closure due to lack of business
- A shift in operations, for instance from on-site eating to drive-in or delivery
- An increase in the demand for emergency items such as water or disposables by healthcare operations
- An increase in the demand for healthcare feeding
- Excess capacity of some operations shifted to healthcare feeding or feeding the public at points of distribution like churches or schools
- Inability to pay accounts owed
The Emergency Planning Action Team
The first critical action for every distribution center is to form an Emergency Preparedness Action Team (EPAT). The team should be made up of executives, managers, staff and line people representing each functional area. The EPAT should have a strong leader, with one or two back-up leaders identified in case of illness or death during a pandemic (or other emergency).

The Action Team should identify “trigger points” or “tipping points” that will be the indication that certain planned actions should be initiated. For instance, when the media is beginning to concentrate on how hospitals will get necessary supplies like food and water, that would be the time to put the media plan in action that explains how your distributorship has a plan in place to handle that eventuality.

Responsibilities of the EPAT
- Identify each potential emergency situation that could arise during actual pandemic, predict degree of impact on the business and rank in order of priority to predict appropriate response.
- Establish a chain of command with back-up in case of illness or death.
- Identify preparedness team and assign roles and responsibilities.
- Identify who “owns” each activity. Ensure that there is accountability.
- Determine all proactive steps that can be taken to minimize emergencies and responses during pandemic.
- Create a timeline of action development with priority sequencing of preparation and response.
- Work with other task forces to create planning deadlines and a budget for each activity.
- Develop flow chart of responses to pandemic as it progresses.
- Predict needed staffing levels; work with other task forces to identify all essential and non-essential functions during a pandemic.
- Ensure emergency communication capability, with multiple back-ups.
- Develop a budget to fund all planning and emergency response activities.
- Meet with healthcare officials to establish the need for foodservice workers to receive vaccines and other anti-viral measures that may be in short supply.
- Plan for post-pandemic recovery.
- Collaborate with other distributors on communicating with government officials; speak as one industry voice.

1 A “trigger point” is used colloquially to mean a turning-point event.
2 A “tipping point” is a dramatic moment when something unique becomes common.
PLANNING FOR A PANDEMIC

TASK FORCES

Since there are numerous actions that must be planned for, it will be more efficient to break the EPAT into smaller task forces focused on particular activities. Each task force should have specific roles and responsibilities related to its identified activities.

The following suggests one possible model for task forces. It suggests which distribution functions could be included on each task force. It provides guidelines for responsibilities for each task force and gives a list of “Centers of Activity” for each task force. The Centers of Activity are areas of focus that could be assigned to each task force with the goal of maintaining operations during a pandemic.

The Centers of Activity, or suggested areas of focus, are:
- External Relations
- Communication
- Employees
- Customers
- Vendors
- Supplies
- Security

One model could be based on three task forces: An Oversight Task Force, A Communications Task Force, and an Operations Task Force.

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THE OVERSIGHT TASK FORCE

This group would be responsible for global issues that could affect the company, other members of the supply chain and the community at large. It would also coordinate the activities of the other two task forces.

It will be particularly important for this task force to prevent disabling impact from external pandemic emergencies. Distributors should anticipate each one and (1) work with government and other relevant officials now to ensure that distributors do not become victim to policies based on misperceptions of the importance of foodservice distribution, and (2) create emergency response action plans to minimize and manage the impact of unavoidable consequences such as employees not showing up to work.

Suggested functions to be represented on the Oversight Task Force are:
- Executive
- Human Resources
- Quality Assurance
- Finance/Accounting

Responsibilities of the Oversight Task Force
- Identify who can work from home.
- Plan for possible reallocation of employees, facilities and fleet. Consider all worst-case scenarios for the redeployment of assets.
- Begin formal cross training for critical functions, like selecting. Management, office staff and sales people could work in the warehouse, for instance. (Note: It will be most difficult to cross train drivers as Commercial Drivers Licenses and experience are needed.)
- Identify volunteers who could come to work in place of missing employees. These could be retired or former employees or family members. Add skill level and availability of volunteers as part of database of employees. Volunteers should be trained.
- Consider that you may need screening procedures for employees who come to work. This would entail having a medical person on site.
- Identify and address all legal issues surrounding emergency actions.
- Consider whether the company will need to house critical employees on site or in nearby facilities.
- Establish policies for sanitation, such as proper handwashing, best practices for coughing or sneezing, social distancing.
- Consider that the company may need to supply food and personal supplies like tooth brushes to employees.
- Be prepared to aid other activities, such as feeding healthcare workers.
- Prepare to have to deliver to alternate food points, such as trauma centers set up in school buildings or portable kitchens.
- Increase borrowing capacity to survive crisis. Determine the amount of cash you will need to have on hand.
- Plan for disrupted accounts receivable/accounts payable, and the credit/debit network.
- Determine the impact of pandemic relative to insurance and to pension funds.
- Review insurance coverage.
- Ascertain if there will be economic relief afterwards, for example, business loss insurance
- Plan for possible lawsuits arising from emergency actions.
- If the company donates items for relief program, keep track of what, how much and to whom in case of future reimbursement
Centers of Activity for the Oversight Task Force: External Relations and Employees

External Relations
Assumption: It is extremely important that the Emergency Preparedness Action Team appoints several employees to be liaisons with officials in federal, state and local departments and agencies to understand the entire scope of preparedness that is underway. These organizations will provide guidance in preparedness measures. It is also important that the organizations do not establish preparedness measures that don’t take into account the capabilities and the issues pertaining to foodservice distribution. It is critical that distributors have a voice in decisions and processes that could affect their ability to continue operations during a pandemic or even to assist the community in pandemic response measures.

Recommendations:
• Determine the importance of the role of each function involved in pandemic preparedness in the local, state and federal government.
• Become familiar with federal government functions that are working on pandemic preparedness; create a dialog with officials that will also serve to educate them about the business of foodservice distribution, i.e. what distributors will need to do during a pandemic to serve their customers and what they could do to help distribution of emergency supplies. The goal is to prevent federal government mandates that may not be appropriate or might be punitive due to lack of understanding of how the foodservice distribution industry operates.
• Identify local and state government emergency plans and the preparation status of local, regional and state health officials. Build relationships and collaborate with health officials and any government functions that may have responsibility during a pandemic. Learn what they envision during a pandemic and how that would affect your operation. Educate them about the activities and capabilities of the foodservice distribution industry.
• Identify who decision-makers will be for giving vaccines; establish priority status of warehouse workers and drivers for early immunization.
• Build external relationships with competitors and wholesale and retail grocers in case you need to collaborate during pandemic. (Ex. You might share warehouse workers with a competitor or ship foodservice quantities to retail grocer for consumer distribution).
Employees
Assumption: Recognize that employee absenteeism could be your biggest challenge in continuing operations. They may stay home because of illness, fear of becoming ill, transportation problems, quarantine or because schools are closed and their children are at home.

Recommendations:
- Create an employee database and keep it current, with contact numbers (phone, email, address).
- Establish proper prevention habits ahead of time, such as hand sanitizers, social distancing, sneezing or coughing into the elbow, etc.
- Establish policies in advance for sick leave, flexible hours. (Ex. If there is no sick leave established, a sick employee might be compelled to come to work and infect others.)
- Research health coverage available for employees, for instance, what screenings are covered.
- Provide employees with information for at-home care of victims.
- Create educational material for employees, including how to contact Red Cross, what kind of help will be available (Note: All educational material should be vetted by lawyer to ensure accuracy and to prevent liability.)
- Help employees prepare for their households, i.e. what they need to store, etc. Advise them on how to take care of “primal needs” like food, water, etc.
- Advise employees to keep an extra supply of any medications they need to take.
- Establish how you will screen workers for illness during a pandemic; consider having a nurse or physician on site.
- Set up direct deposit or credit card system for all employees well before a pandemic or other emergency occurs.
- Cross train employees to cover critical positions during a pandemic, such as order filling or unloading.
- Recommend that employees stock a supply of food and water for a one-week minimum, preferably two weeks. This should be shelf-stable food, such as canned fruit or vegetables, soup, etc.
THE COMMUNICATIONS TASK FORCE

This group would be responsible for all written, verbal, print and electronic communication with employees, customers and vendors. Communication would range from education prior to a pandemic to emergency contact during. It would include obtaining the pandemic preparedness plans of vendors and customers pre-pandemic as well as placing and taking orders and emergency contact during a pandemic.

Suggested functions to be represented on this task force are:
- Information Services/IT
- Marketing
- Sales
- Purchasing
- Food Safety
- Administrative

Responsibilities of the Communications Task Force
- Identify credible official sources of pandemic information.
- Establish a crisis hotline for all constituencies: employees, customers, vendors.
- Give employees information that will let them know what is expected of them. Provide emergency response training for all employees.
- Educate employees and customers about what a pandemic would mean and how your company plans to prepare and respond. The goal is to make them as psychologically ready for a pandemic as possible.
- Coordinate pandemic response training with employees.
- Obtain customers’ crises plans.
- Initiate a program of customer awareness training. This could be accomplished at your food shows and by sales reps during regular visits.
- Identify all possible contingencies for customers, for example, government-mandated triage areas at schools.
- Identify core products that would be needed for customers, such as gowns, masks, disposables, single-use serviceware, etc. and stock them. For example, experts suggest that two liters of water per person per day would be needed.
- Obtain vendors’ crises plans.
- Identify all vendors of products that would be essential during a pandemic.
- Consider that products may be diverted to retail grocers for bulk purchasing by the public.
- Develop alternative method for communicating orders, both to vendors and from customers.
- Provide multiple contact numbers to customers for reaching sales personnel or drivers in an emergency.
- Identify alternate local vendors in case of fuel shortages.
- Determine from healthcare operators how they will handle the preparation of the high volume of meals necessitated by a pandemic.
- Determine extent of extra capacity and back-up that might be needed to handle employees working from home.
- Establish process for transporting data to alternative worksites, with backup.
- Determine impact if computer service is interrupted.
- Establish process of restoring service.
- Have Country of Origin data on all products ready for customer demand.
- Anticipate a price freeze.
Centers of Activity for the Communications Task Force: Communications, Customers, Vendors

Communications
Assumption: Communication with employees, customers, vendors and the media will be critical to preventing disruption of business. It will be particularly important to help Human Resources staff, as they will bear the burden of these responsibilities.

Recommendations:
• Post a pandemic FAQ sheet on the company website that employees and customers can download; make hardcopies available as well.
• Identify one executive (with backups in case of illness or death) who can communicate with the media; make sure the spokesperson has public relations/media exposure training.
• Advise employees that they should not communicate with the media about any company activity related to pandemic planning or response.
• Prepare press releases about what the company is doing to plan for a pandemic and what it is doing during a pandemic, particularly on the topic of food supply and food safety.
• Make certain that the team is able to obtain up-to-date, accurate information about the pandemic and any government mandates. Create a place to post this information on the website so that all employees can access it.
• Create an emergency communication process that would operate during a pandemic. This would include a phone or text tree, email, social media and website postings.
• Provide links to healthcare organizations on the website for employees and customers.

Customers
Assumption: You will want to know, as much as possible, which customers plan to continue some form of operation during a pandemic. For instance, a fast food restaurant may plan to keep its window service operating. On the other hand, a fine dining establishment may plan to shut down for the duration of the pandemic. Healthcare and prison foodservice operators will have to remain in operation.

Recommendations:
• Educate customers about your plans and preparedness.
• Determine customers’ pandemic plans.
• Identify customers’ priorities; what are their intentions. Do they plan to stay open? Will they only operate takeout? What will they need from your company?
• Begin educating customers about your preparedness plans.
• Identify all customers who would be critical during a pandemic, such as hospitals, nursing homes or penal institutions and become involved in their planning in order to meet their needs effectively.
• Consider how product mix might change, with greater emphasis on disposables and critical items like water or chemicals.
• Work with customers that plan to remain open to reduce or reschedule days of delivery.
• Consider how customers could unload their deliveries in case drivers do not want to risk contact and you have to drop ship; consider key drops.
• Plan for accounts receivable issues. You may have to write off a considerable amount of business.
• Plan method for keeping in contact with customers as pandemic progresses.
• Utilize sales reps to be points of information about company plans; they can also bring information back to the company about customers’ activities before and during a pandemic.
• Review existing contracts with healthcare and government customers for such things as agreements to supply storage in case of an emergency or other obligations.
Vendors
Assumption: It will be important to communicate with vendors well in advance of a pandemic to identify potential threats to ordering and receiving of necessary products.

Recommendations:
- Educate vendors about your plans and preparedness.
- Identify all vendors’ pandemic preparedness plans.
- Identify alternate vendors that are in closer proximity in case fuel is in short supply and long-distance deliveries are curtailed.
- If repair and maintenance services are outsourced, identify alternate companies for service during a pandemic.
- Identify receiving process if vendor drivers will not unload; agree on charges if warehouse employees have to unload.
- Develop alternative method for communicating orders.
- Develop alternative methods of delivery, for example, to an off-site location for pick-up and transfer of goods.
- Communicate with brokers about potential need for different mix of products during pandemic.
THE OPERATIONS TASK FORCE

This group would be responsible for all aspects of physical distribution, from the warehouse to transportation. This team would be the hardest hit during a pandemic as it requires physical activity that must be executed on site. Careful preplanning for all contingencies, especially a severely reduced work force, will be extremely important.

Suggested functions to be represented on this task force are:

- Warehouse
- Transportation
- Inbound and Outbound Logistics
- Security

Responsibilities of the Operations Task Force

- Prioritize critical operations employee functions, create contingencies for no-shows and greatly reduced work force.
- Establish emergency guidelines for selectors to diminish the chain of contagion from one shift to another.
- Establish specific plans for drivers, especially how the company will find and employ additional drivers during a pandemic.
- Adjust procedures to minimize contact between drivers (inbound and outbound) and warehouse personnel.
- Anticipate fuel shortages.
- Insure sufficient generators in case of power outages.
- Anticipate alternative deployment of rolling stock, for instance being shifted to assist grocery distribution.
- Establish policy regarding out-of-date products or perishables during pandemic.
- Train employees in proper sanitation methods.
- Plan work schedule with reduced staff.
- Work with the Oversight Task Force to institute cross-training for warehouse and transportation jobs.
- Regulate the drawing of products during pandemic.
- Determine who has access to the warehouse and provide credentials for entry.
- Plan for the need for extra security for drivers who are distributing food during a pandemic.
- Plan for additional security for the warehouse and any storage facilities.
- Consider police escort for drivers
- Consider that delivery could be complicated because of territories crossing city, county or state lines where different regulations might be established and plan strategy to address.
- Plan alternate customer delivery methods to minimize human contact.
- Conduct backhauls to address shortages and delivery difficulties.
Centers of Activity for the Operations Task Force: Supplies and Security

**Supplies**
Assumption: It will be important to identify critical supplies that will be needed during a pandemic and make preparation for storing and distributing them.

Recommendations:
- Identify critical core items needed to stockpile, such as water, gloves, gowns, masks, sanitizing chemicals, disposables. This should be done in coordination with purchasing and sales.
- Put core supplies in protected area where they will not be picked prior to pandemic.
- Identify several alternate sources and substitutes for critical products.
- Plan for a fuel shortage; keep tank supplied; develop relationship with refiner.
- Consider that government or National Guard could commandeer fuel.
- Make sure power units are topped off.
- Plan for increase in demand for ready-to-use, heat ‘n’ serve items.
- Consider what the company will do if the ports are closed and imported products are not available.

**Security**
Assumption: Security could become a big issue, depending on how the infrastructure responds to the public’s need for food. If there are food shortages, there could be “hi-jacking” or robbery of truckloads of food. There also could be attempts at breaking in a warehouse. In addition, there could be employee theft. It will be advisable to plan for extra security measures during the various stages of the pandemic.

Recommendations:
- Ensure security in warehouse, with back-up plans in case of disruption of usual security measures due to absenteeism or infrastructure problems.
- Consider camouflaging trucks to prevent hi-jacking.
- Plan for protecting drivers: consider sending two together; educate them about not resisting if they are held up.
- Use alternate routes and times of delivery.
- Consider a police escort for drivers if necessary.
Good planning and preparation, both by businesses and individuals, will provide stability during the disruptions caused by a pandemic.

MORE RESOURCES

IFDA has created a resource page with information for employers. Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, Department of Labor, World Health Organization, IFDA counsel Littler and others are available.

Please visit www.IFDAonline.org and navigate to Issues under the Issues & Advocacy tab.